

“The place which religious giving is meant
to occupy in the christian economy.”

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, SHERBROOKE, AT THE ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ST. FRANCIS ASSOCIATION OF THE
CHURCH SOCIETY,

BY THE

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—AND—

EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF QUEBEC.

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SERMON.

EPHESIANS III. 9, 10.

Who created all things, to the intent that now, to the Principalities and Powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.

These words have always seemed to me, more than any others to answer the question, why such a world as ours was created; why such a strangely perplexed state of things as our world presents in its whole history should have been called into existence. It is not simply that the design of it all is for God's glory; that is involved in the fact that God *is*. Nor is it only to say that the world was made for the Church; that, too, is an elementary principle which every one who knows the fact of the Incarnation recognizes at once. If God the Son has become man, and saves men by gathering them into His Church, then His Church,—the body of which He is the head,—must be the final cause of the world's creation. But it is more than this that we are taught here. It is, that Almighty God, in, if we may so speak, contemplating and planning from eternity His creation of all things, so planned His then future creation as a whole, that, to the highest intelligences in it, His Church, the Divine Society of His elect people, should be, in all its parts and in all its history, the means, the most perfect means, of making known the

loftiest heights, the most secret depths, the endless ever-varying reaches of His own manifold wisdom. This was "the purpose of the ages which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Well might the Apostle, on giving utterance to so all embracing a thought, burst out into the exalted prayer that follows,—that God would grant unto christians to enter into this great mystery, to take in "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," and so be "filled unto all the fulness of God!"

Into this far-reaching passage, I do not purpose now further to enter, than to lay it down as the foundation-principle on which we, who are in any sense builders in God's House, ought ever consciously to be building.

Everything in and about the Church *now*, as well as forever, is appointed to be, to the Holy Angels a means of growth in the knowledge of God's manifold wisdom: this ought to be the ground-thought with christians in all their working for the Church. There can be no detail too trifling to be ordered by it, which bears any relation to that glorious Temple, which no less in the building of it than in its perfection and everlasting continuance is to serve so great a purpose.

And it is to such builders that I am appointed to speak to-day. We are met, both laity and clergy, here this week, as we meet from year to year, to take counsel together respecting that work, and to encourage and strengthen one another's hands in doing it.

And this year especially is this our consultation important when the synod of our Province has called on us to take a new departure in the work of missions. The Church in Canada herself in her corporate capacity has once again moved in this matter of missions, and calls on us to move. She reminds us of a very

special opportunity, now in God's Providence opened up before us, of helping to lay broad and deep the foundations of the Church in that section of the Dominion which seems destined to become the most important part of Canada. The harvest, she tells us, is ripe ; the need urgent ; the danger of losing the opportunity immediate, an opportunity, which, if we do not take advantage of it at once, will pass into the hands of others. She tells us that a nation's fortunes and religious character are now at stake ; that the future of a continent may depend on our action or inaction. She calls on us to give, and to give at once, our sympathy, our prayers, our help, our money.

To all this our hearts fully respond ; and had we nothing to do but to speak cheerful words and pass resolutions, the matter would be very simple. But when we are asked, what we propose to *do*, the case is very different. Our hands, we then discover, are full already. We are being thrown more and more upon our own resources. Our wealth and numbers are probably not materially increasing. Our own Diocese is itself a missionary field : there is much people in it yet to be won into the Church. Can we fairly or without cruelty be called upon to take part in this outside work ? Thus we argue. We look round each upon his own little field with all its needs, and we are in despair ; we sigh and resign ourselves to doing nothing.

But are we already doing all that we ought ? Ought we to be satisfied,—we, I mean not the clergy, but the Church ; is the Church in this Diocese doing enough or nearly enough ? Is she in a healthy state in this matter of contributions for missions ?

I thank God most deeply for the progress we have

made, which is real and much ; progress not only in self-sustentation, but in sending money away out of our own borders and sending it away cheerfully. The growth of the missionary spirit is evident. Algoma has proved a blessing to us. The missionary unions of Quebec, Lennoxville, Richmond (perhaps others of which I know nothing) are bright spots for the christian heart to rest on. But after all, when we come to deal honestly, as before God, with the question, and ask, Do we ourselves, and do our friends and neighbours, do what might fairly be expected ? Can we the clergy speaking each for the people of his own charge say that they are doing their duty ? Have we really done more as yet than to make a very small beginning in this matter of religious giving ?

Nay, is there not a deeper evil to be first cured ? Is not the matter of raising funds for all religious purposes a never-ceasing source of trouble and vexation to us ? I do not mean in this District or Diocese only, but everywhere throughout the Church, yes, and among all who profess and call themselves christians ? Does there not seem to be a hopeless *worldliness* about the collecting of money for God, something which christians, even the best of them, shrink away from, something which they feel to be degrading and try to escape as much as possible, and only submit to as a necessity ?

Think of the way in which it is spoken of. Asking contributions of christians for the work of that Kingdom for which they as christians exist, is called by the degrading name of *begging*, a word which I never hear used in this connexion without a burning sense of the insult it is to my Heavenly Master. Then think of the spirit in which such solicitations are received by many

other wise excellent persons, an ungracious spirit almost at the best. Think of the temper in which the clergyman is too often met by his own parishioners, when, in the most unselfish spirit, he takes upon himself this office so hard to flesh and blood, the wounding answer he too often hears, 'O, you are always asking for money.' Next, look at the miserable expedients earnest people are tempted to resort to, to get round all this unpleasantness, the worldly, sensual means used, means in which all the worst parts of man's nature are openly pandered to. And all for what? For Christ's Kingdom!—to build up that society for which God chose to 'become poor,' and died on the cross!—that Kingdom which he instituted to teach angels the highest flights of wisdom and holiness!

Surely there must be, in our conception of this matter of giving, something radically wrong, some grand fundamental mistake, or such things could not possibly be. May not a review of the whole subject possibly be helpful towards a discovery of wherein our great weakness lies, and helpful towards a remedy?

It is upon an attempt to solve this sore practical difficulty that, throwing myself upon the kind consideration of my brethren, I venture this morning.

Now, first, is it possible that our mistake lies in *this* direction:—May it be that we have in the course of ages mistakenly built up an artificial system never intended by our Lord, and that His Church, in His intention, was never to need money? I have thought this carefully over, and I do not believe that the solution lies in this direction. I think we may safely lay it down as a principle, that there is a necessity involved in the very constitution of the Christian Society, for the

contribution of money. Not only is the Church to devote herself to the relief of human misery in every possible form, and for this purpose to collect money, but money is required for the Church's own work, for the direct propagation of the Gospel. Nothing could more strikingly show this than the example of the Lord himself. He, not only with all the resources of Heaven at His command, but having up to that time supported Himself by the labour of His own hands, was pleased to give up that labour on entering upon His ministry, and to live upon the contributions of His followers. He called His Apostles from their trades and occupations to give themselves up exclusively first to preparation for, and then to the work of the Gospel. They, seated on their twelve thrones, lay it down authoritatively as His ordinance, that His ministers are not to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, but to 'live of the Gospel.' Then, in that work, to provide the means of 'converting all nations' and 'teaching' them when converted,—schools, books, the Divine Word, and the places and instruments of Christian worship,—for all this money is absolutely required. This then is not a matter outside the divine constitution of the Church, but inseparably interwoven into its very framework.

But if so, God must have had some wise and good reason for embodying in this Divine Society such a provision. The work of providing funds must be, in his ordinance and intention, not what we find it, a thing soiling and degrading, an exhibition of the meanness, littleness, selfishness of regenerated human nature,—a shame even to ourselves, and what then to the Holy Angels?—but on the contrary, it must be something, which, if carried out as He intends will glorify Him,

and fill even angels with wonder at His manifold wisdom.

But how can it be so?

The matter presents itself to my mind in this way:—

1. What is the immediate object for which our Lord came into the world? It is, in His own words 'to save the world,' in the words of His apostle, 'to save sinners.' But this 'salvation,' does it not involve two things—the care of the *disease* of sin, and the development of man's nature to its highest possible perfection?

2. What, then, are the means by which this 'salvation' is to be effected? The atoning death of incarnate God, and our union with Him, as the second Adam, by the regenerating, renewing grace of God the Holy Ghost. These, of course, are elementary principles,—we are saved by the direct personal work, for us and in us, of God,—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

3. But *how* does God so save, *how* so work in us? By what laws does he proceed in applying to us, by the Holy Spirit the saving efficacy of the 'Blood which cleanseth from all sin?' Surely, we can have no hesitation in answering, it is *upon the line of the laws of our own nature*, the laws which he stamped upon it when it was originally made. He does not 'destroy' that nature, for He 'came not to destroy' any part of his own work, but He 'fulfils' it. Were it not so, God would deny Himself, acknowledge failure in his own handiwork. But what need of argument? The laws originally stamped upon man are as eternal and unchangeable as, with reverence be it said, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' by which he is renewed.

4. Now there is one way and one only in which in accordance with those laws man's soul can be 'saved,'

that is, the disease of sin eradicated, and man's own nature healthfully developed. Let a man be converted, regenerated ; what then ? Is the work done ? Nay, only begun. The instruments of salvation have as it were been put into his hands, and he made willing to use them : now he must proceed to 'work out His own salvation.' I am now confining your attention, of course, to man's side of the work. The old evil nature, the flesh, is still there, and is to be destroyed ; the new divine nature is there, and is to be developed. But how ? By the man himself (St. Paul tells us, not in one place but in an hundred) 'working out his own salvation.'

This is the law of our nature. We are what we train and educate ourselves to be. We form in ourselves, gradually, 'by patient continuance in well-doing'—patience in weeding out evil principles and habits, in resisting and overcoming our fatal tendency to give in to wrong principles and wrong habits ; and patience in cultivating right principles and forming in ourselves godly and manly habits,—it is thus that we form in ourselves the permanent character of goodness. Or in other words, the way and the only possible way to undo the evil taint of our nature is by acts of the contrary ; the murderous tendency, by acts of kindness and love ; the thievish tendency, by working and saving for the purpose of relieving distress ; the adulterous taint by acts of voluntary denying our innocent bodily appetites. It is thus and thus only that there is formed in the christian who is faithful unto death 'the new man,' which at length becomes 'the perfect man,' and attains to 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'

The solution of our difficulty seems to me to be in

sight ; but let me ask you to take with me one step more.

5. In this divine process of salvation, the difficulty lies in what the apostle so strikingly calls 'the *deceitful* lusts.' They get, in most cases, a fearful start in the work of the formation of character. Now, it seems to me that if we could search down among all those evil propensities and find out their root, the parent of the viperous brood, which if we could strangle all would die ; if we could be absolutely certain that there is one evil principle deep down in the heart of every one of us from which as from a fountain all the evil of our nature proceeds, and find out what that one root of evil is,—the advantage to us, in this struggle, must be simply immense.

And this is—what ?

The question has been considered and answered, of course a hundred times, but in our day exhaustively by an eminent philosophical German Divine, Dr. Julius Müller, in his classical treatise upon 'the Christian Doctrine of Sin.' And his answer is——. But before man's word is heard, let the Lord speak and answer this most vital question. And he answers it, gives the same one answer to it in endless forms. First and most impressively when He 'bears witness to Himself,' that His own perfect holiness consists in 'not seeking His own will' or 'His own honour,' but the will and honour of His Father. Sin, then, is the opposite of this ; its principle and essence is to seek one's own and to please oneself. Again, the Lord's definition of goodness is love,—to love God, to love one's neighbour. Therefore sin is the opposite of love ; but love, in its essence, is self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice. Again the Lord

says, ' If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself ;' the root of sin, then, must be self-seeking. In a word, the whole testimony of scripture is that the great crisis between the old life, under the governing principle of sin, and the new life produced by the Holy Spirit, is the point at which man ceases to live for himself and to seek his own. This, then, is the real principle of sin, its one root ; and this is Müller's answer,—it is *selfishness*.

And selfishness, in its outcome, what is its first product ? Is it not covetousness ? For selfishness takes two forms, the lust of human approbation, or ambition ; and the lust of sensual pleasure. But the love of money embraces both of these, for money is the representative of them both—it is what can buy for the selfish man what he most covets, the guarantee to him of the fullest satisfaction of his selfishness. Hence, if the eradication of sin from our nature is the immediate aim of the Gospel, provision must be made in its system, its organization, first and last for the strangling of our selfishness.

What provision is made for this ? I have already answered the question. The way, and the only possible way, to root it out is *by acts, ceaselessly repeated, of unselfishness*. Giving, that giving continually upon which our Lord so much insists, giving from pure and unselfish motives, giving in such a manner that self can derive no nurturing food in return, this is nothing else than the Divine instrument for the salvation of the soul.

My brethren, what I have now said may seem a strong thing to say, and yet time permits me little more than to leave it in its nakedness. To my mind, to illustrate it from Scripture as it might be illustrated

would be almost to transcribe the entire volume. Think how our Lord tested men with this call to give ; how the fearful and deadly malignity of the sin of covetousness beyond all other sins seems set before us in Judas, the type, I suppose, of the lowest fall of our nature ; how the sin of idolatry, the one deadly sin of the Old Testament, is to us christians covetousness ; and then connect this with the description of the Man of Sin of the last days who is openly to set up self as God. Then think again what strong things our Lord says of the effect of giving,—how in His description of the last judgment, it is made the one virtue ; how He goes so far as to say—on the one hand that it is humanly speaking impossible for one who has riches to enter into heaven, and on the other is not afraid to say that if we ‘give alms’ ‘all things are clean to us,’ and even more, that ‘the friends we make’ by such a use of our money ‘shall, when we die, receive us into everlasting habitations ;’ how He tells us, in the Beatitudes, that it is ‘showing mercy’ that produces in us the ‘purity of heart’ by which alone the soul can ‘see God ;’ how He sums up His whole religion in one commandment, that we should ‘love one another ;’ and love in action what is it but giving ?

Then, descend from these heights and look at the world around you. Think of those wonderful pictures drawn by our own great popular writers, writing from their study of human nature and with a serious purpose, for example, by Charles Dickens, of the effect upon the heart of benevolent actions,—how one act of kindness leads on to another, purges out of the heart its meanness and selfishness, develops the more generous qualities of man’s nature, and makes in the end the

poor narrow selfish mortal a new man.

Looked at, then, in these lights, christian giving, the the Divine instrument which the Holy Ghost, working on the lines of the laws of man's nature, must and does use for the subduing and final destruction of the great master sin of fallen man, is seen to be a part and no mean part of the divinely wise constitution of the Divine Society, the most glorious City of God.

And as the Angels of God, while they gaze with the love and sympathy of Heaven upon the working of that Divine Society, see how this great principle of continual unselfish giving produces its effect; how it begins first to weaken the bands, the mighty bands, of that habit of selfishness in which the poor weak christian is, albeit unconsciously, ^{so} a fearfully tied and bound; how it raises in the heart ever nobler and better thoughts, and forms in it the habit and character of love, by making it taste and see how sweet a thing real goodness is; as they see the struggle it excites in the poor selfish heart, when the old lust of selfishness rises up against the Holy Ghost's call to deeds of love which cost something; the pain of the struggle, and then the victory, then the growth in goodness; and this ever, day by day, renewed, with growing strength, growing light and sweetness, growing likeness to the Father who is in Heaven,—surely we can understand how they may see in all this something more, some ever new light thrown upon the ever-growing manifestation to them of 'the manifold wisdom of God!'

A very few moments more only, Brethren, can I ask of your attention.

The direct practical bearing of all this upon the missionary work, upon every department of the work o

the Church, is manifest. If giving is the instrument in the Church of Christ which we have seen it to be, fills the place among the ministries of grace which we have seen it is meant to fill, this lays upon all christian people, especially on us, not the clergy only but the laity also, who are called to be in any degree the guides of others, a very deep responsibility. It warns us to be ever watchful to lift up this part of christian work high out of the reach of those soiling influences of the world to which it is so much exposed. It teaches us that everything connected with christian contribution, the asking for, the giving, the accepting, the collecting of funds for whatever religious purpose ought to be ever so conducted as to be a direct help to the giver to grow in grace. Surely, then, none but the purest and highest motives and instrumentalities should ever on any consideration be used. It suggests to us, I think, to dwell much in our thoughts, when we so sorely lack money for the Lord's work, and are tempted to use any means to get it,—to dwell much upon the truth that money in itself can effect nothing; that ever so little rightly given can do more for God than ever so much wrongly given; that unless it is clean and pure, shining with the lustre of christian love and self-denial, it is an insult to the Holy God to whom we offer it, and can only hinder the cause it is meant to serve.

And does it not suggest, Brethren, two other thoughts; the one, that if this is God's way for the salvation of individual souls from the deadly sin of selfishness, and we, by giving in to methods of providing funds in which lower motives are appealed to, in which selfish motives are appealed to, make that which in God's intention is His instrument for the destruction of their

selfishness an instrument for fostering and developing it, are we not so far—it is a serious thing to say—hindering and checking the work of their personal salvation?

And, on the other hand, if the reasoning of my sermon is sound, does it not put our work who have to engage actively in obtaining money for christian enterprise in a totally different light? Does not our very generosity sometimes tempt us to think that we are the friends of our friends when we stand as a shield between them and instrumentalities which seek to reach them in this matter of giving? But now, with this view of things, we could not but welcome for their sakes such instrumentalities, as a most holy ministry to them. And for ourselves, how could we ever think anything of time and trouble and vexation, and hard speeches and the imputation of wounding motives, if only we could induce our brethren to begin to practice,—however hard it may be at first for them, however much they may resent it, this divine gymnastic for the production of a sound and healthful christian character? How patient it would make us in persuading men to give rightly, how forbearing, how unwearied; how watchful over ourselves in setting an example of generous self-denial; how careful to let men see it is not their money we covet but something far better, higher, which lies behind!

And surely in all this, it must help us, if we could keep ever before our eyes such great principles, such inspiring motives as my text supplies. It fills one's soul with awe to think of the great eternal purpose, we, each and all of us, are appointed to serve; that we, poor as we are, are God's own chosen instrument, as members of His church, for revealing, in the working of His grace in all we do for Him, to His most Holy Angels, deeper and ever deeper secrets than any they have yet learned of the unsearchable riches of His manifold wisdom.